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We Are But A Little Lower Than Angels

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WE ARE BUT A LITTLE LOWER THAN ANGELS

(for Cecilia)

We call ourselves Sasha and Sasha. We wear red and carry bags filled with black strapped heels, amulets and love poems for luck. The pink house on Ramona Avenue is ours. Inside, we grow our hair long, do the csardas, waltz by ourselves. People believe we are sisters. Before we open for the chanteuse or the famous magician with his elegant assistant, Sasha braids my hair, then spends hours painting her toes and mouth the color of figs. We dance at the Club Memchose, our arms to the ceiling like the necks of cranes stretched in courtship, our toes spreading like Spanish fans.

Tonight we dance without shoes. Sasha wears the dress that flows down her back. Mine is satin from Spain, tightly fitted, cinched at the waist. The audience of generous wives and their men sip cognac, tilt their heads to the east, and a room of mostly white ears is all that can be seen from where we move. Each evening, when the dance is done, we rush to our changing-room always filled with bouquets we have picked. We wait for the gentlemen, for those who bring notes with gold boxes of chocolate. We wait for the love poems and gestures of love. We wait. We pack our bags and leave.

Inside the pink house on Ramona Avenue, we comb our hair and, still wearing our dresses, still hoping for a knock at the door, we open our bags. As if, on our way home, some charming surprise had fallen to the bottom. I take out the book of poems and read. Opposite each page is a photograph of angels or maidens fleeing on the landscapes of the 18th century. Sasha is dancing. How she dances, adagio, her hips driven, full legs strapping and sexual then spreading like a great bird that knows its own beauty.

The piano in the corner is Russian. I pin up my hair before touching a note, before tilting my head to the east, as I play Satie, as she hums the melody, keeping an eye on her shadow.